Summary of a study by Hungarian ornithologists on Mount Cameroon

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As Hungary does not have any diplomatic or trading relations with Cameroon, it caused quite a stir that three ornithologists from the Hungarian Action Team for the Conservation of Nature (TACS) visited the country in autumn 1996. The TACS foundation is involved (amongst other projects) in organising and assisting important international ornithological surveys, and thus offered help to the Mt. Cameroon Project, which was accepted.

We reached Cameroon following a delayed journey via Nigeria but then, in Limbe, we were given a warm welcome and met O'Kah, the project's zoologist and ABC's representative in Cameroon.

Our work

Fieldwork was conducted by three Hungarians and O'Kah, who were accompanied by a cook, two guides and one lepidopterist. Our work was to collect comprehensive data in five different sample areas on the volcano where no previous ornithological studies had been made, or additional work was required. As Mt. Cameroon is ranked among the 25 most important forested areas for birds in Africa[2] and lies within two Endemic Bird Areas (EBAs)[3], it is important to collect as much data as possible on the area's fauna.

Primary rainforest around Debundsha Lake (Ákos Hivekovics)

Lowland primary rainforest around Debundsha Lake (Ákos Hivekovics)

Our first sample area was N'jonji Lake at c350 m, which lies deep in undisturbed lowland forest. Three different survey methods were used in each area: mist-netting (with ringing), canopy-netting and daily line-transects. At N'jonji Lake, 83 birds of 29 species were ringed during the six-day ringing period, and line-transects produced a further 33 species. The five most common species were: **Olive Sunbird** *Nectarinia olivacea*, **Yellow-whiskered Greenbul** *Andropadus latirostris*, **Rufous-vented Paradise-Flycatcher** *Tersiphone rufocinerea*, **Brown-chested Alethe** *Alethe poliocephala* and **Grey Malimbe** *Malimbus nitens*. These five represented 61.6% of the total number of birds caught. Rarer and interesting species recorded were: **African Piculet** *Sasia africana*, **White-spotted Flufftail** *Sarothrura pulchra* and **Cameroon Olive Greenbul** *Phyllastrephus poensis*.

The second study area—Lava-flow—takes its name from an eruption in 1922 which created a huge lava-flow down to sea-level. It destroyed all the vegetation in its wake—which has since re-grown—but local people currently use the area for farming. Our camp was established near an uninhabited banana plantation. Here, we caught 196 birds of 46 species (not including re-traps), whilst line-transects produced an additional 17 species. The five most common species were **Yellow-whiskered Greenbul**, **Little Greenbul** *Andropadus virens*, **Bluebill** *Spermophaga haematina*, **Olive Sunbird** and **Black-headed Weaver** *Ploceus melanocephalus*. These represented 43.7% of the total number of birds caught in this

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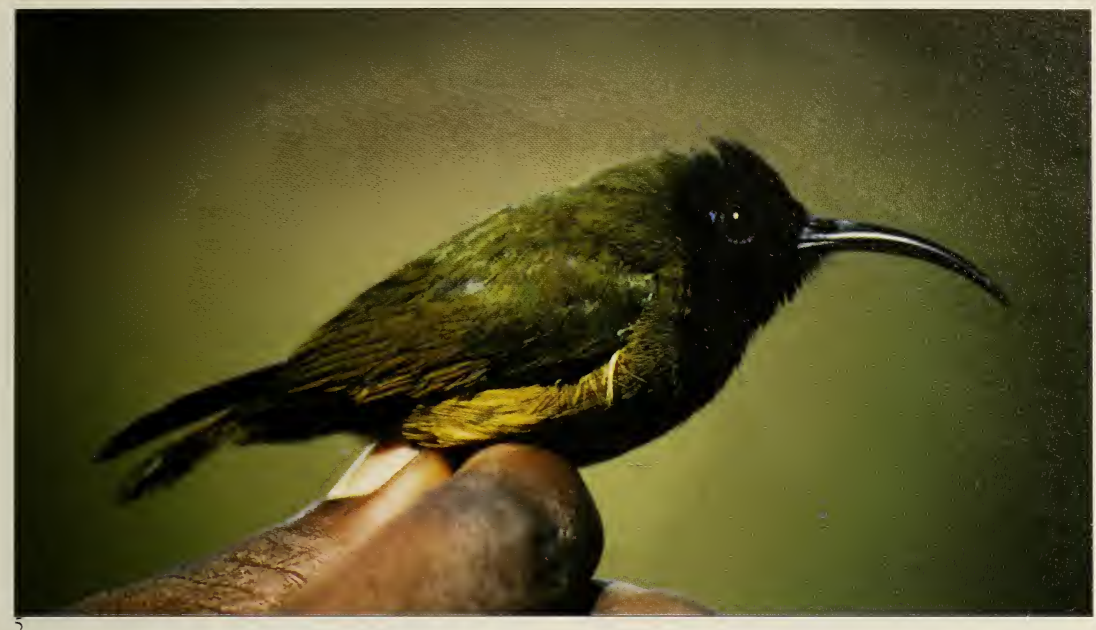

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1 West African Goshawk *Accipiter (tachiro) toussenelli* (Ákos Hivekovics)

2 Blue-shouldered Robin-Chat *Cossypha cyanocampter* (Ákos Hivekovics)

3 Simple Greenbul *Chlorocichla simplex* (Ákos Hivekovics)

4 African Piculet *Sasia africana* (Ákos Hivekovics)

5 Cameroon Blue-headed Sunbird *Nectarinia oritis* (Ákos Hivekovics)

6 Black-eared Ground-Thrush *Zoothera camaronesis* (Ákos Hivekovics)

area. Most interesting were records of **Black-eared Ground-Thrush** *Zoothera camaronensis* and **Blue-shouldered Robin-chat** *Cossypha cyanocampter*.

Debundsha Lake—our next study site—which has the third highest annual rainfall of any place in the world (9,000–10,000 mm pa), is situated in a symmetrical secondary crater near the sea. The approach is difficult and consequently the area is largely undisturbed. Because of the near-perma-

nent rain, we only caught 44 birds of 14 species, whilst line-transects provided an additional 21 species. The most common were: **Little Grey Greenbul** *Andropadus gracilis*, **Olive Sunbird**, **Yellow whiskered Greenbul**, **Bluebill** and **Pygmy Kingfisher** *Ceyx picta*. These five species comprised 76.1 % of the total number of birds caught. More interesting species recorded were **Green-tailed Bristlebill** *Bleda eximia*, **White-browed Forest-flycatcher** *Fraseria cinerascens* and an **African Grey Parrot** *Psittacus erythacus*, which is available for sale everywhere in Limbe, despite its CITES II status.

The fourth sample area—at the border of the cloud-forest and the savannah region—is known as Man's Spring and lies at c3,400 m. Canopy-netting has never been performed there. Annual rainfall is comparatively low, only 2,000–3,000 mm, while the relative humidity is always c95%. The region's diversity is lower than in lowland rainforest, with only 12–14 plant species per 0.5 ha. The dominant tree species in this cloud-forest (*Pittosporum* spp., *Ilex mitis* etc.) are not more than 20–25 m tall. Despite the relatively depauperate vegetation, the number of bird species recorded was significantly higher than at other study sites: we ringed 166 birds of 21 species of which the most common were **Yellow Bishop** *Euplectes capensis*, **Black-crowned Waxbill** *Estrilda nonnula*, **Oriole Finch** *Linurgus olivaceus*, **Northern Double-collared Sunbird** *Nectarinia preussi* and **Black-capped Speirops** *Speirops lugubris*. These species accounted for 67% of the total number of birds caught. Two endemics were recorded: **Cameroon Blue-headed Sunbird** *Nectarinia oritis* and **Mountain Saw-wing** *Psalidoprocne fuliginosa*. Because of the permanent cloud and rain, line-transects were abandoned as we only observed one species that was not trapped—a dark-phase **Eleonora's Falcon** *Falco eleonorae*, which made a brief appearance. There is just one previous record in West Africa, from Mali (D Ristow pers. comm.), and future observers should be aware of the possibility of its occurrence.

Our final study area was in Bakingili Forest, a secondary forest at c400 m. Here we caught 54 birds of 13 species, and line-transects produced 36 more. Only one species not previously trapped was caught: a **West African Goshawk** *Accipiter (tachiro) toussenellii*. The five most common species were **Yellow-whiskered Greenbul**, **Little Grey Greenbul**, **Olive Sunbird**, **Forest Robin** *Stiphrornis erythrothorax* and **Brown Illadopsis** *Illadopsis fulvescens* which accounted for 79.9% of the total number of birds caught.

Conclusions

The primary aim of our work in the Mt. Cameroon region was to collect data to reinforce the volcano's conservation importance. In this respect we caught six species endemic to south-west Cameroon and nearby offshore islands, and recorded a total of 116 species during the survey. Seven of these are considered threatened by BirdLife International[1]. Most of these occur in undisturbed forest.In addition, four species of migrant from Europe (**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*, **Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus*, **Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* and **Great Reed-Warbler** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*) were trapped during our stay on the mountain. The principal human influences on the area are hunting and agriculture. Tree-felling is not such a serious problem as valuable hardwood trees were cut by German colonists between 1890–1918, and the replacement growth is not yet ready to be felled. The most significant problem is that villagers practise shifting cultivation and thus it is important to acquaint them with agricultural strategies which respect environmental considerations as well as socio-economic interests.

Savannah on Mt. Cameroon, with Petit Mt. Cameroon (2,700 m) in the background (Ákos Hivekovics)

Acknowledgements

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References

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